THE KNIGHTS OF THE GRAIL

NELSON

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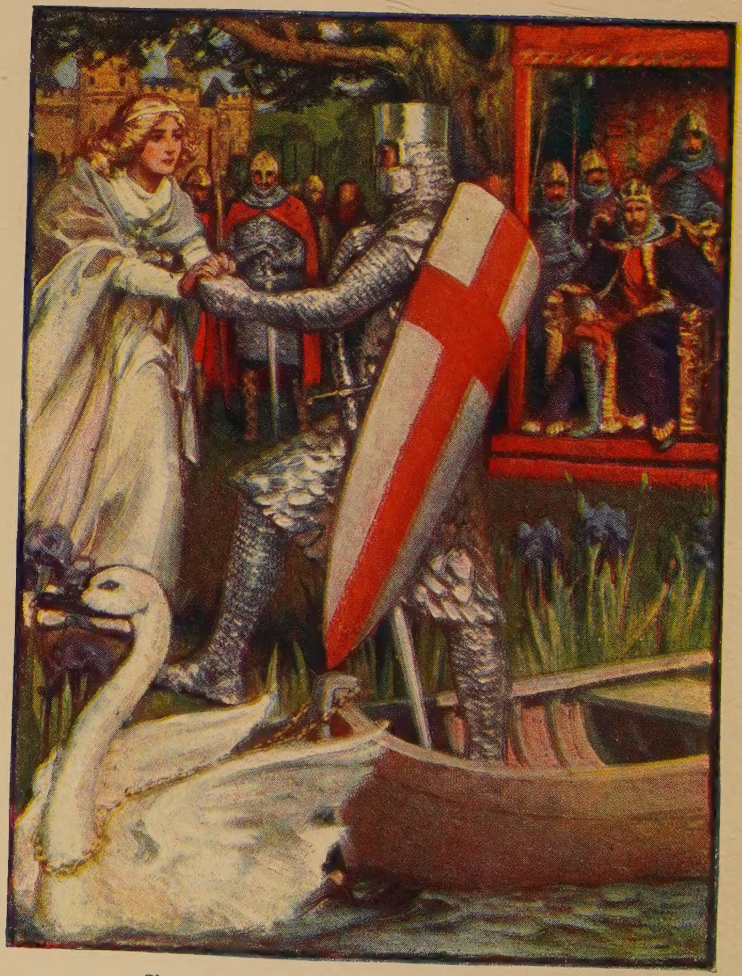
LOHENGRIN : GALAHAD



She went to meet him with outstretched hands.

KNIGHTS OF THE GRAIL

LOHENGRIN : GALAHAD

BY

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LOHENGRIN;

OR,

THE KNIGHT OF THE WHITE SWAN.

LOHENGRIN.

Chapter I.

ELSA AND GOTTFRIED.

LONG years ago there lived in the town of Antwerp a beautiful maiden named Elsa. Her father had been Duke of Brabant, of which state Antwerp was the capital; and at his death Elsa and her young brother Gottfried had been left to the care of a certain Count Frederick of Telramund, who was to rule in the place of Gottfried until he was old enough to come to the throne.

For some years all went well. Count Frederick was not an ill-disposed man; he ruled the country wisely for his young ward,

and treated the brother and sister with care and kindness. None who watched them at this time could have imagined the sad fate which hovered over them, nor have dreamt of the evil influences which were soon to disturb their lives.

After the death of their mother and father, Elsa, though but a child in years, had sought to fill the place of parent as well as sister to the little Gottfried, who was some few years younger than herself; and a most close and warm affection between the brother and sister was the result. They could hardly bear to be out of each other's sight; and in all their spare time they might have been seen wandering together hand in hand under the dark pine trees which surrounded their home, or, when the weather did not permit of this, sharing some youthful sport or innocent amusement within the walls of the castle.

But Elsa had now left childhood entirely behind her, and though Gottfried was still but a boy, she had grown into a tall and fair maiden, whose hand suitors began to seek in marriage. Elsa herself knew nothing of this, because they came first, as was the custom, to the count, her guardian, and the count sent them all away without allowing them to approach Elsa at all ; and this he did for a very good reason, as will soon be seen.

Now, though the count sent away all Elsa's suitors, the fact that she was being sought for in marriage reminded him that the time had come when she was old enough to be married ; and he therefore sent for her to tell her of a very important matter which so far he had not thought it necessary to disclose.

As Elsa entered the room where the count was awaiting her, he could not help being struck by the girl's beauty. Her wealth of

golden hair hung round her shapely head in a profusion of curls, and her sweet, innocent face, with its clear blue eyes, was slightly flushed with excitement and wonder. He received her with a grave courtesy which puzzled the girl greatly, as it was unlike the familiar manner in which he was used to greet her ; and only when he had caused her to be seated on a couch covered with rich embroideries did he begin to tell her why he had sent for her.

"Elsa," he said, taking her hand gently in his own, "has it ever occurred to you that I shall not always be your guardian ?"

"Why, yes," she replied, feeling half frightened, though she knew not why. "When Gottfried shall come of age, will not your guardianship over both of us cease ?"

"Gottfried will not come of age for some years yet," said the count. "Meanwhile you,

Elsa, are a woman grown, while he is but a boy. Your father, the late duke, however, thought of all this, and arranged for your future before he died. I am to cease to be your guardian, Elsa, when you are of an age to marry, but your father took care that you should not be left without a protector. It was arranged between us ere he died that I should then become your husband. While you were still a mere child your hand was promised to me. The time has now come for me to claim that promise. I only await your consent to proclaim our betrothal."

But to Elsa herself these words brought nothing but grief and dismay; for though she had learnt to love the count very well as her guardian, the idea of being his wife was entirely distasteful to her.

"My father could never have made such a cruel promise," she replied indignantly. "What! am I to be disposed of as if I were

a bundle of goods, and as though I had no heart or feelings of my own? If it be indeed as you say, and a promise was made in my name before I was of an age to be consulted, I refuse to be bound by such a cruel act; and not even the plighted word of my dead father shall induce me to wed one whom I cannot love as a husband."

The count was taken aback by this unexpected opposition, for he had imagined Elsa to be of a weak, yielding character, who had only to hear his wishes to be ready to obey them.

He was very angry at first, and thought by stern words to force her to obedience.

"Never," he cried, "did I hear of a maiden behaving in like fashion to this! Surely it is enough for you that the affair has been settled by those older and better able to judge than yourself! Come, let me hear no more of such folly. Tell me when

you will be ready for the wedding, so that I may announce the appointed day."

"I shall never be ready for any wedding at which I am to be bride and you bridegroom," said the girl. "Is it likely that I should consent to such a mockery as a marriage where there is no true affection on either side?"

Here, however, the count saw his advantage, and hastily interrupted her.

"There, Elsa, you do me great wrong," he said. "Of your feeling for me I do not speak, though truly I think you would soon learn to love me; but of mine for you I can do so with knowledge, and I hereby declare to you that I love you truly. If your father's promise has, as it appears, no weight with you, perhaps my deep affection may have some influence."

Now the count was speaking the truth here, for he had really learned to love Elsa,

and, apart from the promise made to him, he did very much long to have this good and beautiful young princess for his wife. Elsa was a little touched by the genuine feeling that she detected in his voice, and though she had no intention of yielding to him, the count noticed that a softer expression came into her face, and that she looked at him with a little gleam of tenderness in her eyes. Upon this he seized her hand and would have kissed her, but Elsa drew herself away from him before he had time.

"Elsa! Elsa!" he said, "you know not how dear you have grown to me. You cannot be so cruel as to refuse to marry me?"

Then all Elsa's soul rose up once more in angry protest, for she knew that in truth she did not love the count at all, and that she would be doing her own soul, and his also, a very grievous wrong were she to marry him. She also knew that she had

in all probability a hard task before her, for it was a difficult matter in those days for a girl to go against the wishes of her parents or guardians in the matter of whom she should marry ; and when she was also a princess, it was still more difficult for her.

"Indeed, I will never marry you," she said, "and whether you love me or not can make no difference to this decision of mine. I can never love *you*, count."

"Why not, Elsa?" he persisted. "Am I frightful to look upon, or anything but a brave knight and gentleman? Moreover, have you ever received from me aught but kindness? Unless you can give me some reason for your reply, how am I likely to abide by it?"

Then from the girl's lips, before she knew what she was going to say, there fell the words,—

"In truth, I can never marry you, count, because my heart is already given to another."

had come, and Elsa again found herself standing before the count.

"Since you cannot even tell me the name of your mysterious lover, Elsa," he said gravely, "I can but imagine that either he does not exist, or that you have some unworthy reason for hiding it. In either case, I choose not to discuss the matter with you further now. Leave me, and we will have more conversation on this subject later. Meanwhile, you will think over your folly, and, I hope, come to a better frame of mind." And with these words the count dismissed her from his presence.

Chapter II.

THE LADY ORTRUD.

THERE was living not far from the castle at this time a lady named Ortrud, who was the descendant of a former line of dukes of Brabant. She possessed a beauty of a certain kind, for her features were regular, and there was something striking and imperious in her manner. But this beauty—if, indeed, it could be called by such a name—stood in as great contrast to the beauty of Elsa as the false glare of candle-light at night is to the blue sky and sweet sunshine of day. Ortrud's hair was a rich, deep auburn, her colour was bright, and her lips full and red; but those who regarded

her closely could hardly fail to see that from beneath her slightly overhanging brow her deep eyes gleamed with a light suggestive of something evil.

This expression was a true index to the nature within, for Ortrud was one who had given herself over to wickedness. The key to her whole character, and to the baneful influence it exercised on those with whom she came in contact, lay in the fact that *she did not know what love meant.*

It is perhaps not easy to imagine all at once what is meant by these words.

It meant, it must be remembered, that Ortrud had never felt affection in any form —that she had never cared for her parents, or her brothers and sisters, or a child, or a husband, or a friend, or even for an animal. All that makes the true worth of life, as well as its happiness and beauty, was as unknown to her as the beautiful world around

us is to a blind person. She was like a landscape which might have been fair to the eye, but on which the sun has never shone, so that where light and gladness and flowers should be there is nothing but darkness and gloom.

But this was not the only result. Character is a soil which must produce something, and if fair flowers do not grow there, poisonous weeds are sure to spring up. And so it was with Ortrud. Her active mind, failing to find an outlet in fair thoughts and good deeds, had turned its attention to what was known as the Black Art, and she dabbled in magic and sorcery. With this dark power to help her, the evil which Ortrud was able to work was indeed great, as this story will soon show.

On the day when Count Frederick had tried to win from Elsa the confirmation of her father's promise that she should wed

him, Ortrud had discovered what was taking place; and it was with great wrath that she contemplated the idea of the marriage between Elsa and her guardian, for she had designs of her own with which such an event would most seriously interfere.

In the first place, she had made up her mind that the throne of Brabant should be hers, and that, as she was the descendant of the older line of dukes, the people would support her claim. But at the same time, she knew that to accomplish her desires would be impossible while so powerful a personage as the count was on the side of the orphans, and that if he were to marry Elsa this would serve very much to strengthen the position of Gottfried as the heir. She also knew, however, that even if she could get rid of the orphans, she herself would not be able to enforce her claim unless at the same time she had the help of the count; so her idea

was not only that Elsa should not marry him, but that she should do so herself.

To her own evil nature it never occurred that Elsa would refuse a marriage with so wealthy and powerful a suitor; and she intended to wait until the wedding was actually arranged, and then endeavour to break it off by poisoning the mind of the count against his promised bride. It was with this object that she sought him out soon after his interview with Elsa; but she was much too clever to let him see her real purpose at first, and she pretended that she had only come to congratulate him on his intended marriage. This she did so well that the count was quite thrown off his guard.

"I have come at once, dear count," she said, "hoping to be the first to wish you joy. Your ward has, I understand, but now left you as your affianced bride. My hearty congratulations on your betrothal."

At this Count Frederick, who was still smarting under Elsa's refusal, turned angry eyes upon her and begged her to name her informer.

Ortrud was herself somewhat taken aback at this unlooked-for turn of events; but her quick brain at once jumped to the conclusion that something had happened which might make her own task easier than she had expected.

She continued to speak to the count with an assumed meekness which quite deceived him, and by this means she succeeded in gaining his confidence.

"Indeed, if I have done wrong in coming, I would ask your forgiveness," she said. "I thought that it would soon be a matter of common knowledge that Elsa had long been promised to you as your bride, and but now I was told that you had sent for the maiden to inform her of the fact. Moreover, I

saw her myself but an hour or two ago, coming from you all tearful and agitated, as is the way with young girls at such a prospect. But pardon me, I beg, if I have been mistaken and over-hasty in my desire to congratulate so old and true a friend as yourself."

She spoke so gently and kindly that the count was quite touched.

"It is but natural that you should have formed the conclusion that you have done," he said; "and it is perfectly true that I have but now acquainted my ward with the arrangements that her father made with me long ago. Moreover, the maid has grown very fair, and I wish to make her my wife as soon as possible. All is straightforward except for the whim of the girl herself, who declares that she will have none of me."

Ortrud had listened to this speech with

genuine surprise, but by the time the count had done speaking she had rapidly adapted her plans to this unexpected development of events.

"Impossible!" she cried. "A mere girl like Elsa to refuse the bravest and handsomest knight in the whole of Brabant! She is surely mad, or else the greatest fool alive!"

"That may be," said the count gloomily. "Doubtless the girl has more than the usual share of the folly of her sex and age; but the fact remains that she would not listen to reason, and declares that nothing on earth will induce her to keep to this promise made by her father. She even hinted that her heart is already bestowed, though who this secret lover may be she either cannot or will not disclose."

Now Ortrud listened to this with a great sense of exultation, for it seemed as if every-

thing was falling out to further her own designs.

"Alas!" she cried, with hypocritical distress, "to think that one so young as Elsa should be so full of deception—though, for my part, I should never trust those fair-skinned, innocent-looking maids over-much. I am not entirely surprised at what your words imply."

Then, as the count made no answer, but continued to gaze moodily before him, she suddenly changed her tone.

"Be a man!" she said, in a deep voice, fixing her evil eyes full on him. "Whatever you do, pull yourself together and show that you are above caring for the silly whim of a maiden who is all unworthy of your regard. Do you not see that her refusal is in reality the best thing that could have befallen you? Were you to marry her, what position would be yours for the rest

of your life but that of brother-in-law to the duke? You! brother-in-law and a mere vassal to your own ward, the feeble stripling Gottfried! Indeed, to me it seems a blot on your honour that you should even wish for such a thing. Were you not born to be the leader? Where will you be when this boy comes of age and takes the reins of government which you have held so long? You, the bravest and best man in the state, will be but a servant, at the beck and call of a ruler whom you cannot but despise."

"That will happen in any case," said the count; "and by marrying Elsa my position at the court will be a better one instead of a worse."

"Fool!" said Ortrud, in tones of bitter scorn. "Is your marriage with Elsa the only course by which your position may be improved? Why submit to this boy?

Are you not, after him and his sister, the nearest of kin to your cousin the late duke? Only cowards submit. Had you sufficient spirit within you to claim the throne for yourself, why should you not be the Duke of Brabant instead of Gottfried? And, moreover, remember this," she added menacingly, "that I myself am the sole descendant of an older line than either yours or his, and should you lack the courage to claim the throne, I will myself wrest the sceptre from that feeble hand. Then you will needs submit to the rule, not of your ward, but of a woman. Such, I warn you, count, is in truth my intention; and if ever I sit on the throne of my fathers, I assure you that it will be no light and easy rule to which you will have to submit. You are too dangerous, Count Frederick, not to be held in check. Strong rulers do not allow strong subjects more freedom than they can prevent."

As Count Frederick listened to this speech and felt the piercing gleam of Ortrud's evil eyes strike to his very soul, it was as if a part of his nature slowly withered up, and with it the love that he felt but a short hour before for the pure and noble Elsa. And he found himself wondering that he should ever have cared for one whose beauty seemed to him colourless beside that of the woman before him. Moreover, what did not her words imply? With such a woman as this to help him, what might he not accomplish?

"Have you no proper pride, no ambition," continued Ortrud, "that you sit meekly down to bear the insult of this girl's refusal, and let the boy, her brother, calmly take his seat upon the throne?"

"I am his guardian," said the count feebly. "Besides, he is the lawful heir. The people would never consent to his being thrust aside, or submit to other rule."

"Perhaps not while he *lives*," said Ortrud musingly.

There was silence while they gazed into each other's eyes. In Ortrud's the dark purpose implied in her words was to be plainly read, but the count shrank from it. He was not yet wholly under the power of Ortrud's wicked enchantments.

"You would take that innocent life!" he exclaimed, turning from her in horror.

And Ortrud saw at once that to press such an idea would be fatal to her own interests. For the moment she had really meant to suggest that Gottfried should be murdered, but now she rapidly thought of another means by which the troublesome heir might be removed from her path. Murder, she reflected, does, after all, leave awkward traces, and some safer method might be used.

Ortrud, as already stated, had studied sorcery, and she had attained such proficiency in

this art that she could use magic. She was using it now in a mild form by obtaining such an influence over the count that his noble nature was stifled, and he was ready to become a tool in her hands for the furtherance of her own designs. But she could go further than this, and had even studied a method of throwing evil spells on people to such an extent that they could be transformed from human semblance into that of animals. It was with a vague plan of exercising this gift of sorcery on Gottfried that she now replied, though she was careful not to let the count into her secret.

"You do me injustice, count," she said coldly, "in hinting at such a thing. Murder is not in my mind; but children are subject to various accidents, and the path may be made clear for us in other ways. If not, surely one who is as yet but a child cannot be such a formidable foe as you imagine.

Success might easily be yours, yet no foul deed stain your conscience. But there is one thing which you lack." She stopped significantly.

"And that?" asked the count eagerly.

Ortrud dropped her eyes with mock modesty.

"You should divine that for yourself," she said, "and spare me the necessity of telling you."

"Ortrud, I beseech you, tell me your meaning," said the count.

"If you insist," said Ortrud; "what you want is a wife of power equal to your own. With such a helper you might accomplish all you wish. Without her, the people will never consent to your accession."

"There is but one who can supply that want," whispered the count. "Ortrud, with you as my wife I might, as you say, accomplish anything. Will you marry me?"

So everything had happened better even than Ortrud could have imagined, and she could scarcely conceal her exultation, clever actress though she was. She dropped her eyes once more for fear they should reveal her triumph, as she replied softly,—

"Yes, count, as you wish it, I will marry you. What, indeed, could a weak woman do unaided? With you by my side to help and protect me, we might both rise to heights undreamt of yet."

"How soon can the wedding take place?" asked the count eagerly, his soul now all afire with base ambition.

"The sooner the better," she replied. "There is no action possible until we are united. And now, count, you have given me much to think of. I will leave you for a while."

So Ortrud glided snakelike from the room where her evil magic had already accom-

plished so much. In a tower of her own house was a room fitted up with all the apparatus and instruments by means of which she studied her evil art, and thither she now betook herself. Until a late hour she might have been seen poring over folios and gazing into mirrors and crystals.

And in a safe chamber of the castle the boy Gottfried slept the innocent and happy sleep of childhood, undisturbed by any dreams of the dark fate being prepared for him close at hand.

Chapter III.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF GOTTFRIED.

A FEW days later Elsa and her brother were wandering together in the pine forest which surrounded the castle. The maiden had heard the news of her guardian's betrothal with feelings of untold relief and gladness, since this would prevent the count from troubling her further with his suit. One feeling, however, still remained to trouble her peace, and that was the aversion she had always felt for Ortrud, and the fear that her guardian's marriage must necessarily bring her much into contact with one whom she disliked so much.

Beyond this vague feeling, however, she

did not allow her thoughts to wander. Little did she imagine the evil designs which Ortrud had already begun to weave round her, and that this very day was to bring about a terrible sorrow and crisis in her own life.

Meanwhile, the boy Gottfried was rejoicing in an overflow of youthful health and spirits; and as brother and sister chased each other through the dark woodland paths, Elsa threw all care aside and entered with zest into his sport. But suddenly it seemed as though a cloud fell on everything, blotting out such flickering sunlight as had penetrated through the closely-grown trees, and causing a gloom to fall on the spirits of the brother and sister. It was as if some ill-omen or threatened disaster was upon them, hushing their gay laughter and filling their hearts with dismay. The next minute, as they turned a corner of the forest path, they

found their way barred by the form of Ortrud, who was coming in their direction.

She gave them an ordinary greeting as they passed ; but as she did so, an evil gleam from her deep-set eyes fell on Elsa, striking a chill of horror to the girl's soul. Gottfried, however, with the heedlessness of youth, did not notice this expression, but was attracted by a curious and richly-ornamented chain which Ortrud wore suspended round her neck. Noticing where the child's attention was fixed, Ortrud stopped, and, with a smile, asked him to come nearer and examine the chain. An uncontrollable impulse caused Elsa to lay a hand of warning on the boy's arm.

"Nay, come, Gottfried," she said, fixing her clear eyes on the dark ones of Ortrud ; "trouble not the lady."

"It is no trouble," said Ortrud kindly.—

"Come hither, Gottfried, and take my pretty chain in your hand if it pleases you."

The boy impatiently shook off his sister's detaining hand and hastened from her side; and as Ortrud bent over him to let him handle the chain she whispered in his ear,—

"The chain has magic in it, and it shall be yours if you follow me. Pay no heed to your sister, who will seek to detain you. You shall return to her in a few minutes. Now go back to her for the moment, but watch where I go."

Puzzled but excited by the mysterious message and the directions given, and full of eagerness to claim the chain, Gottfried now returned to Elsa, who had remained a little apart, watching the scene.

"Come, Gottfried," she said, with a sigh of relief, holding out her hand; "we must return to the castle at once."

The boy shook off his sister's detaining hand.

But Gottfried did not seize the proffered hand as was his wont. He stood gazing with fixed eyes after the retreating form of Ortrud until she had passed out of sight.

"Come, Gottfried," repeated his sister.

"Nay, Elsa," replied the child, "I do not want to go with you. I am not ready to return home. Wait for me here while I go but a little farther into the forest."

As he spoke he started off in the direction which Ortrud had taken.

"Nay, nay, Gottfried," cried Elsa, with a strange feeling of dread. "Go no farther to-day. Let us return home."

She stood as though rooted to the spot as the child hurried unheedingly from her. Some power which she seemed unable to resist held her motionless, and she felt somehow that her best chance of persuading

Gottfried to return was to show that she would not accompany him. But Gottfried hastened on, and in vain Elsa raised agonized appeals to him to come back. Not until he had turned the corner and was no longer within her sight did she realize her complete failure to detain him.

Then with a great effort she shook off the sense of powerlessness which oppressed her and hastened after him. Struggling still with this unknown influence, which seemed to drag at her footsteps and hold her back, she reached the turn in the path where the boy had disappeared from her view. Before her the forest footway stretched into the deep shadow of the trees, and light marks on the damp earth showed that it had been but recently trodden; but of Gottfried or of Ortrud there was never a trace.

More and more alarmed by she knew not what, the maiden forced herself on with all

the speed she could command, and with the hope that the next turn must show her the form that she sought. The path wound now with frequent curves, each of which seemed to lead into darker and less trodden ways, and here and there the undergrowth was so thick that branches caught and tore her clothes as she passed ; but still she saw traces of small footmarks, and urged by these she pushed on, while the forest glade echoed in vain to her frenzied cries of " Gottfried ! Gottfried ! "

All at once she came to the edge of the forest, and found herself on a desolate open space where she trod on thick stubble and heather, and where wild fowl made their nests near the banks of a deep pool. Some of these creatures of the air and water were flying overhead, as though they still resented some recent disturbance of their usual solitude ; and on the bare space before her

Elsa saw another object which, though innocent in itself, served to fill her soul with horror.

The footmarks were no longer visible on the stubble, but in the midst of it lay a shoe which she recognized with certainty as belonging to Gottfried. On she sped to the very margin of the pool, and on the brink of the water, where the ground was moist and oozing, a footmark again appeared. With eyes full of agony Elsa gazed around her, and once more called her brother's name; but no other trace of the dearly-loved boy could she discover.

The wild, melancholy cries of the waterfowl were still to be heard, but save for these birds no sign of life was anywhere apparent. Then, as she looked wildly at them, a large white swan seemed to detach himself from the rest, and coming down almost to her level, flew round and round

her, apparently in some great distress. But Elsa watched the bird with unheeding eyes, being too much absorbed in her own grief, for of her brother Gottfried she still saw no trace at all.

Chapter IV.

THE TRIUMPH OF EVIL.

WHEN Elsa had at last given up all hope of finding her brother, she hastened back to the castle ; and having first spread the news that Gottfried was lost, she went in search of Ortrud, thinking that, as Gottfried had disappeared in the same direction that she had taken, the lady might perhaps have some clue to give her. Her own nature was too free from evil for suspicion of Ortrud to enter into her mind, and the actual fate which had befallen her brother was one so strange that it was impossible for her to guess it.

Ortrud, however, had not returned to her

dwelling, and nothing could be heard of her: and meanwhile the surrounding country was searched in vain. The pool where Elsa had seen the last footmark was dragged, but no trace of the missing heir of Brabant was anywhere discovered; and there seemed little room for doubt that Gottfried had fallen into the pool and been drowned, and that his body had been washed out of sight by a stream which flowed from it into the river Scheldt.

When the last search party returned bringing no news, Elsa retired to her chamber worn out with grief. But the next morning she was up betimes, filled with a desire that the search should be renewed, though her own heart told her that it would be of no avail. What was her surprise when, in reply to her request that fresh seekers should be sent out, she was told that the count had issued orders that no one was to leave the

castle. Elsa was also puzzled to notice that glances of a most unfriendly character were directed towards herself by those who had hitherto always shown her every mark of affection and respect. From one to the other of the people about the castle she turned in her sore perplexity; but it was the same everywhere, and only unfriendly or averted glances met her gaze.

While the poor girl, half distracted already by her grief for her brother's mysterious fate, sought in vain for an explanation, she received a summons from the count, and was led by one of the retainers to his presence. She found him seated before a table, and by his side, but a little in the shadow, sat Ortrud.

If it had not been for the sight of the lady, Elsa could hardly have failed to notice how cold and stern was the expression of the count, nor have overlooked the strange fact that he neither rose nor

asked her to be seated. But her anxiety to question Ortrud as to her brother prevented Elsa from noticing all this ; and with eager words and gestures she besought the lady to tell her if she had seen Gottfried after they had parted in the forest. Ortrud's cold, hard face had never seemed colder than now as she listened with a scornful smile to the girl's incoherent questions.

" I refuse to answer you," was all she said. " The count will tell you what you appear so desirous to know." Then turning to the count, she said in a lower tone of voice, " What did I tell you ? Saw you ever one so hardened ? Had you not known what I told you from my own lips, she would almost have deceived you, I believe."

And now the count, turning to Elsa, bade her hear what he had to say, and to speak to no one else, since the matter before them was too serious for interruption ; and when

the poor girl tried to explain the circumstances, and how she had reason to think that Ortrud might have seen Gottfried after he left her side, he would not listen to a word.

"Elsa of Brabant," he said, in cold, stern tones, which struck like ice on her heart, "it is useless to dissimulate. This feigned grief and anxiety as to your brother's fate can no longer deceive any one. This lady," and he turned to Ortrud, "was herself a witness of your foul deed. From a point too far away for her to be able to come to his rescue or help, she with her own eyes saw you push your young brother into the pool; she heard his agonized cries until the deep waters slowly closed over him, and he sank to rise no more. Elsa, do you deny this accusation?"

This, then, was the evil story that Ortrud had invented in order to ruin Elsa, after

having first herself enticed Gottfried from her side; and it was a strong proof of the influence which this wicked woman had succeeded in gaining over the count that he should so readily have listened to her false words. Whatever his faults may have been before he was betrothed to her, Count Frederick had at any rate been a brave and chivalrous knight, who would have scorned to believe so vile a tale about one who had no chance to defend herself, and whose character he had no reason to suspect.

Something of this poor Elsa realized as she listened with overwhelming dismay to all he said. She did not know what cruel motive Ortrud could have had for inventing this accusation against her, but she perceived that anything she could say in her own defence would be useless, since she was already condemned in the eyes of her judge.

She felt as though she were caught in a

trap, and her utter powerlessness to defend herself from the evil influences around her seemed to paralyze all her faculties. Besides this, she had a sense of repugnance to lower her dignity by stooping to defend herself from such an accuser. A feeling of numb misery and hopeless dejection crept over her soul, and as the count paused for an answer to his question she simply replied, "I deny nothing."

Whereupon Ortrud, surprised herself at the reply, and filled with triumph at the success of her evil designs, whispered to the count, "There, you hear for yourself whether I accused her unjustly or no!"

"Shameless maid!" now cried the count, "not only have you committed this base crime, but you show no sign of the repentance and remorse which might have been some plea to our mercy. But dream not that the wicked plans by which you sought

first to take your brother's life, and then to seize for yourself the throne which was his lawful heritage, will ever reach fulfilment. The people of Brabant shall know the story, and never will they allow a murderess of her innocent brother to rule over them. Instead, therefore, of your reigning in his place, I myself shall do so as the male next-of-kin to your late father ; and with me shall reign this lady, Ortrud, who will shortly be my wife, and who is the sole representative of the older line. Meanwhile, and until you can be publicly tried, you shall be placed in solitary confinement. Have you aught else to say ere the guards are summoned to lead you hence ? "

Elsa's dazed senses gradually recovered themselves as she heard the count's words, and listened to the sentence which would cast her, disgraced and dishonoured, into prison. Her own sufferings were, however,

lost sight of in the sense of the degradation which would be brought on her house and lineage, and she was about to throw herself at the feet of the count in a frantic declaration of her innocence and an appeal for mercy.

But just as he finished speaking the whole attitude of her mind was changed. Once more, as on the day she refused the count, a soft strain of music fell on her ears, and before her again hovered in a vision the shining form of the mysterious knight, who now whispered to her the words, "Do not fear, Elsa. Your champion will come in time to save you. Your name will be cleared."

And as she heard these words Elsa's former anguish seemed to vanish, leaving her instead with a strange feeling of exultation and comfort. In reply to the count's last question, she therefore only replied that there was

nothing that she wished to say. The guards were then summoned, and she was led out, meek and submissive, to a place of confinement.

"What means this strange demeanour? I understand it not," said the count, turning to Ortrud when Elsa had gone. A feeling of discomfort weighed on him, and he half rose as if to call Elsa back; but Ortrud hastened to give an answer by which this better impulse was at once checked.

"It means guilt, of course," she said. "The girl saw herself trapped, and had no word to say."

And this last part of Ortrud's speech was literally true, as we know, so far as it went; but, like most half-truths, it was really the blackest lie she could have uttered.

"It seems strange," said the count reflectively, "that this boy Gottfried should have disappeared so opportunely, and also most

strange that you, of all people, should have been the one to see the deed of which it was so important for us to have clear proof."

"Not so strange as it appears," said the wily Ortrud. "When I hinted the other day that this obstacle might be removed from our path without our taking action in the matter, I had already read something of the evil purpose in Elsa's heart. For this reason I never let the brother and sister out of my sight if I could help it. To seek to prevent the crime on which she was bent would have been useless; for if one means to accomplish it had been stopped, her crafty nature would easily have found another. But I resolved that at least her act should not pass unperceived and unpunished. And now let us turn our attention to those important affairs of state which await us. It were surely well that our wedding should be fixed for as early a day as possible, as until we are married

we can take no steps towards securing the throne."

Thus did Ortrud seek to divert the mind of the count from the subject of Elsa's guilt, and to make him so commit himself that no turning back would be possible. The true facts of Gottfried's disappearance, which were known to herself alone, she was determined to conceal from him ; for she had not sufficient confidence in his wickedness to be sure that he would aid in her plot against Elsa if he knew that she was innocent.

Chapter V.

ELSA'S CHAMPION.

VERY shortly after this the wedding of Count Frederick of Telramund and Ortrud took place; and while the country was still in a disturbed state, owing to the disappearance of Gottfried and the imprisonment of Elsa, there arrived on the scene King Henry the First of Germany, known as "The Fowler." He had come to Brabant to claim its allegiance, and to ask for help in a war that he was forced to undertake against the Huns, a tribe of barbarians who threatened to invade his country.

The king was a brave and just man. He was much troubled to find Brabant in such

a state of confusion, and to hear of the supposed death of the young heir and the terrible accusation under which Elsa at that moment lay in prison.

Outside the city walls, in a wide meadow on the banks of the river Scheldt, there was a famous oak tree, known as the "tree of judgment," because it had been the custom from bygone days to try prisoners beneath it. In this meadow the king appeared in state, and caused all the nobles and leading people of Brabant to meet him, that he might hear in public what the position of affairs really was, and judge accordingly.

He sat on a gorgeous throne with his own followers around him, and opposite him were assembled all the chief personages of Brabant, with Count Frederick and the wicked Ortrud, now his wife, among them. Then the king called upon the count to speak; and he came forward, and before all that assembly he

accused Elsa of having drowned her brother in order to secure the crown for herself. He also told the king that she had a secret lover whom she was ashamed to acknowledge; and as proof of this, he said that, in the first place, she had refused to marry himself, and that, secondly, she had with her own lips confessed that she loved another.

When the count had finished all that he could find to say against Elsa, he began to urge on the king the claim of himself and Ortrud to the throne. The king listened with grave courtesy to all that he had to say. When the count had finished he descended from his throne, and with slow steps approached the "tree of judgment" and hung his shield on it. This was a sign that he was going to give his solemn decision. He next demanded that Elsa should appear in person before him to answer the charge made against her.

So Elsa was brought out of her prison, and, clad in white, with downcast eyes, she appeared in the centre of the eager throng, who eyed her, some with pity and some with aversion, but all with curiosity.

Now, when the king looked on her sweet, pathetic face, and saw her stand before him in her white dress, with every mark of innocence about her, his own noble nature told him that this was no hard-hearted murderess, and he spoke to her in gentle tones.

"Elsa of Brabant," he said, "you know of what crime you stand accused. Speak, and fear not. What defence have you to make?"

But Elsa, with eyes still downcast, answered softly, "None."

Upon this a murmur arose from the crowd, and on Ortrud's dark countenance a gleam of triumph shone. The king alone seemed unmoved.

"Elsa," he said again, still more gently, "fear nothing; trust yourself to me."

At this Elsa raised her clear gaze to his face, and, moved by a sudden impulse, began to speak. As she did so, her face was lighted up with a glow of ecstasy, as if her soul wandered in some far-off land of dreams.

"Twice," she said, "before I went to prison did a radiant knight appear to me and bid me be of good courage; and as I lay weary and sad in my dungeon, mourning for the loss of my brother and for the evil which had befallen me, a soft sleep overtook me, and again he came. This time it was no distant vision but an actual person that I saw. He was clothed in glittering silver armour, and round his neck hung a wondrous golden horn, while in his hand shone a naked sword. He bent over me, and whispered words of comfort and a promise of help.

That knight will be my champion ; I await him to clear my honour."

Then the king rose and faced the vast concourse of people.

"By my troth," he declared, "this is a case for the judgment of God alone. Let it be decided in single combat, and let God defend the right." Then turning to the count, he said, "Count Frederick of Telramund, are you prepared to trust the matter to the judgment of God, and by mortal combat to support your accusation against Elsa as well as your own claim to the throne ?"

And the count replied that he was.

Then turning to Elsa, the king asked her if she too would be content to entrust her cause to the same test ; and Elsa also answered that she would.

And now there was great curiosity among the people to learn who Elsa's champion was to be, and many whispered, "Now this

secret lover, whom she is ashamed to show us, is at last bound to appear."

But in answer to the king's question as to her choice, Elsa replied that, as she had said before, the mysterious knight of her dreams was her champion; and she declared that she would have no other, and that for him she would wait.

Soon all was ready, and only the champion of the princess was lacking. The heralds went forward into the midst of the open space, and, with a loud flourish of trumpets, cried, "Let the champion of Elsa of Brabant in this holy conflict now stand forth."

But their challenge was received in dead silence, and no knight appeared in response.

"Once more let them call him, my liege," entreated Elsa, turning to the king. "Perchance he hath far to come. Let him be called once more, I beseech you."

Again the heralds went forward; again

they shouted, "Let the champion of Elsa of Brabant appear;" but still there was no answer. Then in the dead silence Elsa fell on her knees and prayed very earnestly.

"O God!" she cried, "send my champion knight to my aid, I implore Thee. Even as I saw him in the vision send him to me now. Bid him hasten to me, I beseech Thee."

Then as Elsa ceased praying, a confused murmur arose from the crowd nearest to the river; and soon voices could be distinguished crying, "See! see! a swan comes near drawing a boat, and behold in the boat there is a knight! And the swan has a gold chain fastened round its neck, and by that chain it pulls the boat after it. What a wonder! What a miracle!"

Then, as all eyes were turned to the swan, watching in breathless excitement to see what would happen next, no one had time to notice that at the sight of it and of the

chain round its neck Ortrud had turned deadly pale, and that she gazed at it with eyes of fascinated horror. In a few moments the stranger knight stepped ashore, and as he did so he turned to the swan, and bade it an affectionate farewell. Then the swan sailed away again, bearing the boat after it, and as it disappeared Ortrud began to breathe freely once more.

Lohengrin—for that was the name of the unknown knight—now advanced to the king, and, making obeisance to him, told him that he had indeed come to act as the champion of a maid most falsely accused. Then he turned towards Elsa; and as she gazed at him she saw the knight of her dreams before her, clad in shining silver armour, and with a gold horn hanging from his neck, just as she had described. She went to meet him with outstretched hands; and as she did so, and the two looked in each other's eyes, it

was as though their very souls rose to greet each other.

"Elsa," said the knight, very tenderly, "will you indeed confide your cause to me?"

Elsa replied that she joyfully trusted him with her honour and with everything that was hers.

"And if I prove the victor in the coming conflict, will you take me as your husband?" he asked next.

Again Elsa gave a glad assent, and told him that everything she had she placed joyfully in his hands.

"Then, Elsa," said the knight gravely, "if I win in this combat I will indeed be your husband, and with my life will I protect you. One condition only I require. Never must you ask of me what my name is or whither I come. Will you promise this, Elsa?"

To Elsa it seemed at the moment but a

small thing to promise one whom she trusted completely, and she said at once that the forbidden question should never pass her lips.

But Lohengrin once more repeated what he had said, for the promise which he wished Elsa to make was a very serious one. It involved all her trust in him, and if she were ever to break it, he knew that dreadful consequences would befall her. Again Elsa assured him that she wanted only his love, and that nothing would ever induce her to break her word.

Then Lohengrin kissed her on the lips, and their troth was sealed.

And now, turning to the count, Lohengrin addressed him in stern accents, declaring that his accusation against Elsa was false, and challenging him to mortal combat.

Then there was heard a blast from the trumpets, and King Henry gave the signal for the fight to begin by striking three times

with his sword on the shield as it hung on the oak tree. At the third stroke Lohengrin and the count began to exchange blows. Fiercely did they fight, for to each victory was as dear as life. Now it would seem that the unknown knight would fall a victim to Count Frederick, so valiantly and fiercely did the latter attack him, and there were few braver knights or more skilled with the sword than he. But soon it was apparent that the nameless stranger was gaining ground, for the count was exhausted by the very fierceness of the thrusts which his opponent made at him with a cool and unwavering aim.

Perceiving this himself, the count grew desperate with baffled rage, and making a blind thrust, gave his enemy the advantage and placed himself entirely at his mercy. And soon he lay prostrate at the feet of the knight, who stood in his shining silver

armour with drawn sword above him, while the people shouted with excitement, and Elsa stood aside with clasped hands and eyes raised heavenwards. As for Ortrud, she turned away with a scowl on her face and a gleam more malignant than ever in her eyes.

"I shall not slay you, count," said Lohengrin, withdrawing his sword from his enemy's throat. "Not thy life, but the deliverance of the frail maiden you so falsely and foully accused, did I seek. Rise and turn your thoughts to repentance, and to seeking that forgiveness from Heaven of which your soul stands in such sore need."

Then the king and all the nobles rose to their feet, and the air rang with loud cries, hailing the stranger as the rescuer of the defenceless, and as the bravest knight who had ever entered the land. And all the people of Brabant rejoiced greatly, for they loved Elsa; and though they had, many of

them, been much too ready to believe in her guilt, they were all glad to know that she was innocent, and to admit that, by giving the victory to her champion, God had proved that she was so.

Elsa and her knight were now escorted in triumph to the castle. But Count Frederick no longer returned there as her guardian. The king at once passed sentence of banishment upon him and upon Ortrud, and, shamed and disgraced, they slunk out of sight for the moment.

Chapter VI.

ORTRUD IN THE GARDEN.

IT was the night before the wedding of Elsa and Lohengrin, which event was to be followed by the proclamation of the stranger knight as ruler of Brabant. For the king, supported by the people, had chosen Elsa's future husband as ruler, though Lohengrin had refused the title of duke, and was to be known as the protector only.

All was still as Elsa, filled with the most joyful feelings, stepped out on the balcony of her apartment to enjoy the soft night air.

How much the whole aspect of life had changed for her in the course of a few days! She who had lain in prison, deserted and

accused of a hideous crime, was now the most honoured lady in the land, and about to become the wife of the bravest and most noble knight, whose love for her and hers for him flooded her whole being with happiness.

Suddenly a chill breeze seemed to strike on her, causing a faint shudder, and the next moment Elsa's happy reverie was interrupted, as her own name rang out in despairing accents from somewhere in the dark recesses of the garden.

She bent over the edge of the balcony, trying to penetrate the gloom and discover who it was that called her, but could see no one. Then again came the mysterious voice calling, "Elsa!"

"I am here," said the maiden softly; "who is it that would speak with me?"

"O Elsa!" continued the voice, "do you not know me who lie here as a suppliant

at your feet? It is I, Ortrud, who appeal to you. Have pity on me, for I am fallen indeed, and in deep distress."

At this Elsa shrank back with an instinct of horror. She had thought that her banished enemy was already far from Antwerp, and that she would trouble her no more; and now, behold! here she was at her very threshold.

Her first impulse was to hasten back to her own apartment and to pay no heed to her. And well indeed would it have been for Elsa had she done so. Her own goodness and purity should in itself have been enough to cause her to flee from so evil a presence as that of Ortrud, but there was also another reason why she should have held no intercourse of any kind with her; for her champion knight had himself forbidden her to do so, and Elsa had promised to obey him in all things.

But Elsa, misled by a false sense of pity for the unfortunate and disgraced Ortrud, allowed herself to be overruled by this; and she bent over the balcony, whispering words of consolation to the unhappy woman beneath her.

In reply Ortrud drew so harrowing a picture of her misery and of the fate in store for herself and the count, that Elsa's heart was still further melted. She told Ortrud that she forgave her all the wrong that she had done her; more than that, she promised to plead for a reversal of the sentence pronounced against her and the count; and, finally, she took the foolish and wrong step of actually inviting Ortrud to be present at the wedding-feast on the morrow.

And now the wicked Ortrud saw that her opportunity was coming, and under pretence of gratitude to Elsa she began to try to poison her mind against her knight.

She thought if she could once persuade Elsa to be untrue to her vow, and to ask Lohengrin his name and country, that his power would be lost, and that the count could then kill him and reign in his place. So now she began to cringe more than ever to Elsa, telling her how grateful she was for all her favour; and then, under pretext of the greatest friendliness, she warned her to be very careful not to lose her knight.

"Alas!" she said, "I feel much for you, sweet lady, in all the mystery that surrounds him who is to be your husband. Did he not come, as it were, by magic, and do not I, who have studied sorcery myself, know how that which comes by magic may at any moment go away again by the same means? Sad indeed were it for thee if, just on the threshold of happiness, thy champion were to disappear to that unknown land whence he came."

"Indeed!" cried Elsa indignantly, "such a chance will not befall. Would you suggest that my knight, who to-morrow will wed me, could for any cause leave me again?"

"I do not say that it is so," said Ortrud. "I only wish to warn you of what may happen. What do you know, indeed, of this knight who makes a mystery even of his name? How can you tell, not knowing who he is or whence he comes, whether he may not be obliged to leave you in the same manner that he came? Ah, Elsa, be warned. Do not trust too much to your happiness."

Thus in Elsa's heart was sown the poison of doubt, though she knew it not, and though in reply she told Ortrud that nothing could shake her faith in the knight whom she loved, nor tempt her to betray his trust. Then, with a fatal impulse of pity, she said,—

"To you, poor lady, the sweet delights of a faith which trusts everything to the one beloved is unknown. Your own misfortunes have made you bitter. Come in through the back garden to my apartment, and let me tell you more of the happiness that fills my life."

Then Elsa turned from the balcony and descended to the door leading to the garden in order to open it to the worst enemy that she could possibly have admitted. Happy would it have been for her as she did so if she could have seen the change that came over the wicked Ortrud. Her cringing manner left her, and her countenance bore its old triumphant gleam of evil as she muttered to herself words of hatred and revenge against Elsa. But Elsa saw nothing of this, nor did she see that farther away in the garden was hidden the Count Frederick, who had been a silent listener to all her

conversation with Ortrud, and on whose face was now a reflection of the evil triumph on that of his wicked wife.

Then Ortrud entered the castle with Elsa, and not till the next day—that of her wedding—did the princess learn how she had been deceived.

Chapter VII.

THE WEDDING.

ALL Antwerp was given over to rejoicing, and the citizens crowded to the cathedral in order to catch a glimpse of the fair princess in her bridal array, and of the champion knight who was to be her husband and Protector of Brabant.

Down the dark, narrow street came Elsa, clad in shining white and crowned with flowers, while before her fair maidens scattered blossoms and sang a marriage hymn. Then, as she emerged from the narrow street with its high-roofed houses into the bright sunshine which flooded the open space before the cathedral, and was approaching the

steps leading to the entrance, a startling interruption took place.

Suddenly some one pushed past the attendant maidens, and stood barring the way of the bridal procession. It was Ortrud, no longer the penitent and humble supplicant of the night before, but her old evil triumphant self, with her dark eyes gleaming, while bitter words of scorn and hate fell from her lips.

"Do you think," she cried, "that I shall let you, Elsa of Brabant, take precedence of me? Back! back! I say. I will enter before you."

For a second Elsa shrank back dismayed at this attack, and filled with bitter remorse at the thought of how she had been deceived by the false appeals to her pity which Ortrud had made the night before. Then with renewed spirit she turned to her enemy and bade her let her pass, reminding her that

her husband the count had submitted to the judgment of Heaven and been found guilty.

"How to the judgment of Heaven?" cried Ortrud. "My husband, as is well known, is the bravest and most skilled knight in the land. Is it likely that he could have been overcome by fair means, or that aught but evil sorcery could have won the victory over him? Tell us but the name of thy champion knight, Elsa of Brabant. Ask him but whence he came and who he is. Then, perhaps, will belief be given to him and honour to you."

There was so much of malignity and hate in the expression and words of Ortrud as she uttered these taunts against Elsa, that the attendant ladies of the bride crowded round her in consternation, anxious to protect her from such evil. But before Ortrud could utter further cruel words, there was

a cry of "The king! the king!" and the next minute Henry himself appeared, accompanied by Lohengrin, and followed by his nobles and attendants.

At the sight of her brave champion there came over Elsa a sweet sense of relief and security, and she rushed to him and threw herself into his arms, crying,—

"Save me, I entreat thee! This lady," pointing to Ortrud, "frightens me by her bitter words."

"Be comforted, my sweet one," whispered Lohengrin, as he pressed her trembling form to his heart. Then turning with flashing eyes to Ortrud, he said, "Begone hence, vile slanderer of the innocent. Leave me and my bride in peace on this our wedding-day, and trouble us no more with your vile presence."

At these words and the commanding tone in which they were uttered, Ortrud sank

back abashed ; and now that peace was again restored, the wedding procession formed once more.

But even yet it was not allowed to proceed without interruption. Ortrud was indeed baffled for the moment ; but Count Frederick was also at hand, and from a place of hiding had watched all that had passed. Now he suddenly sprang before Lohengrin, and with bitter words of scorn challenged him to reveal the mystery of his name and birth. The knight replied with lofty dignity that he was not disposed to hold converse with his vanquished enemy, and that, moreover, as to the question of his name and condition, he was not bound to reply to any person except one.

"This is the only one," he added, turning fondly to Elsa, "who has the power to draw the answer from me, and that power I know she will never use." But as he spoke these

words of loving trust a chill feeling came over the knight for a moment when he noticed that Elsa, instead of returning his glance, had turned her head sadly aside.

And now the king himself intervened. In imperious tones he bade the count to leave them, and declared that the unknown knight was trusted by every one in Brabant. To this the people within hearing raised a hearty shout of response, and as they crowded round Lohengrin, Elsa by some unfortunate chance was separated from him. This was the very opportunity for which Count Frederick waited, and in the confusion he succeeded in seizing the hand of the princess and whispering evil suggestions in her ear.

"Trust yourself to me," he whispered. "I can tell you a way by which you can force his secret from your knight. Let me but once succeed in wounding him, be it

ever so slightly, and he will be compelled to tell you his name and country. Then you will not need to fear that he may have to leave you. I will be in hiding in the castle to-night, and if you call me I will come, and the deed shall be done."

At this point Lohengrin caught sight of Elsa listening with absorbed attention to the count's words, and called her to him with dismay, again bidding Frederick to leave at once. Elsa at once obeyed her knight, and hastened back to his side; but mischief had already been done, for it was a sin even to listen to these suggestions of evil, and treachery to allow herself to doubt Lohengrin for a moment.

The knight now gently reminded her once more of her promise to trust him, and warned her not to allow a suspicion of doubt to remain in her mind; and though Elsa turned to him with words of the deepest

love and trust, and called him her champion knight and hero, and declared that her love was above any possibility of doubt, yet the first radiant happiness of the day seemed to have passed and a cloud to rest upon everything.

It was with timid, faltering footsteps that Elsa allowed herself to be led up the church steps, though from within there pealed the sweet notes of the organ, while without the voices of men and women rose in words of blessing on the nameless knight and on Elsa of Brabant. And just as they were entering the church door an evil omen befell, for, on looking back for a moment, Elsa saw Ortrud standing out from the rest of the crowd with her hand raised in a menacing gesture, and her eyes full of hatred fixed on her own. With a shudder the bride turned and entered the church.

Chapter VIII.

THE FATAL QUESTION.

IT was the evening of the wedding-day, and for the first time Elsa found herself alone with her knight. In their great joy in being together the events which had troubled the earlier part of the day sank out of sight, and a sweet and tranquil happiness filled both hearts. But the evil seed sown by Ortrud and Frederick had not really perished, and before they had long conversed a breath of doubt from Elsa crept like a chill wind over them. In the midst of her happiness she remembered with a stab of pain that she could not call her husband by his name ; and when, in reply to her whis-

pered regret, he softly murmured, "Elsa," it served but to remind her the more of what was denied to her, since she could not on her part address him in like familiar fashion.

In vain did Lohengrin, with a heart oppressed with dread, seek to divert her mind by the most tender expressions of love. He trusted that she would never ask the fatal question, for the answer to which, as he could not fail to see, she was growing more and more eager. As he spoke to her, the doubt implanted in her mind by Ortrud grew ever stronger. She remembered the warning that this evil counsellor had given her, and mingled with her wish to know the name of the one she loved was the wild dread that he might at any moment be summoned from her side, and leave her for that unknown region whence he had come.

With horror and dread did Lohengrin

watch all that nobler part of her nature represented by her love and unquestioning trust in himself sink more and more beneath the burning desire to put the forbidden question.

"Elsa! Elsa!" he cried, "for pity's sake consider whither you are being led. Put away from you, my sweet bride, all thoughts of doubt, all desire to learn that which must be hid. Remember your sacred promise, I implore you."

"Would that I could forget it," she moaned. "Alas! how can one give unfaltering trust where so much is hidden?"

"Elsa! Elsa!" cried Lohengrin again, "control your rash words, or some evil fate must undoubtedly befall us. Come to me, my own beloved one, and put aside from you these thoughts by which you are so deeply moved."

Elsa loved her knight too dearly not to

respond to such an appeal. With a cry of joy she threw herself in his arms, and as he kissed her and murmured soft words of endearment in her ear, it seemed for the moment that all would go well. But, alas! strong as Elsa's love was, it was not yet strong enough to conquer.

As Lohengrin slowly released her from his embrace, doubts began to torture her once more.

"Ah! how happy I would be could I but feel confident that you would be ever by my side to comfort and protect me," she said. "But, alas! what confidence can be mine? I know not your country or the condition of your former life. What assurance have I that some mysterious call may not at any moment summon you from my side?"

"Elsa, Elsa, my sweet wife, beware!" again implored Lohengrin.

But this time his warning seemed to have

no effect. Elsa had by her last speech wrought herself into a state in which all control was lost. To her overheated imagination that which she most dreaded began to assume actual shape.

"Hear you nothing?" she cried, gazing at her lover with wild eyes. "For my part, I am certain that strange sounds are in the air. Ah! now—now I know what it is! The swan appears! It draws nigh to bear you hence, even as it brought you here. The swan—it comes!"

"No swan draws near. 'Tis but the fancy of your overwrought brain, my beloved!" said the distracted Lohengrin.

She heeded him not.

"I can bear this doubt no longer," she cried; and ere he could stop her there burst from her lips the fatal question, "*Tell me, I entreat you, your name, and whence you come?*"

The question was spoken at last, and Elsa

Lohengrin slays Count Frederick.

sank back terrified at what she had done as she saw the unutterable woe depicted on the face of her knight. Then, as they gazed at each other, horror-struck, an ominous sound from without broke the silence; and the next moment the door of the room was flung violently open, and five armed men rushed towards them.

In a flash Elsa remembered the whispered words of the count that morning, and realized her wicked folly in not having warned Lohengrin. She herself seized the sword which he had laid aside when first they entered the room, and handed it to him, and he was just in time to parry the thrust of Count Frederick. The next minute the count himself lay dead on the floor. Then, while his companions in guilt bore the dead body of their leader away, Lohengrin summoned Elsa's women to tend their half-fainting mistress.

But ere he left her with them he addressed her in tones of infinite sadness, enough to make the most hardened weep.

"Elsa," he said, "you have, by your rash deed, and by the want of trust which caused it, destroyed our happiness. To none but yourself should I have been compelled to give an answer to the question which you have put to me; but to you I am bound to do so. To-morrow we are to meet the king under the same great oak where first I saw you. There, in his presence, will I tell you that which you desire to know."

Chapter IX.

THE QUESTION ANSWERED.

THE next day the king was again seated on his throne beneath the great oak tree, with the nobles and people of Brabant assembled before him. Into his presence Elsa was led once more, as on the day when her champion had appeared and fought to clear her honour. She had been sad and downcast then, because she was most unjustly accused of a great crime; but she was much more sad and downcast now, since she had destroyed her happiness by her own fault.

Then, while Elsa stood aside, overwhelmed with grief, among her maidens, there was

brought into the middle of the assembly the dead body of Count Frederick, and after that walked Lohengrin himself. The king greeted the knight warmly, and told him that the reason that he had caused him to be summoned there was because he wished to claim his help immediately in a war that he was about to undertake. With sad looks and grave dignity Lohengrin replied in a voice which all might hear that the king must go to the war without him. Then he told all that had happened: how he had slain the count in self-defence, and how Elsa had been untrue to her promise and failed in her faith, so that he had now come to answer her question in public, since the fact of her having asked it compelled him to reveal the secret.

From all around the people pressed closely forward, listening with breathless excitement to hear the mystery of the knight's origin

explained. But Elsa listened with anguish, because she knew that she had bought the secret with the price of her own happiness; and she sank farther out of sight, overcome with shame and grief as Lohengrin began to speak.

"Far from here," he said, "in the land of Spain, there is a mountain called Mount Sulvat, on which stands a most costly and wonderful temple such as exists nowhere else in the world. Within it is a most precious treasure, which was brought there by angels, and to which a sacred dove comes once a year to renew its strength and power. This treasure is the Holy Grail, and to those knights who are vowed to its service is given a strength more than human, so that when they go forth to fight, the victory cannot fail to be theirs. Before them evil sinks away; and because right is on their side and their hearts are pure, none can slay or

overcome them. When from lands however far one of these knights is summoned in the cause of justice and virtue, he is bound to go; and with him goes the mystic power of the Grail, and remains with him so long as it is not known to others who he is or whence he comes. This is the rule of the order—that the knight be accepted without doubt by those for whom he fights, and that their faith in him be strong enough to stand this test of silence.

"But if he is not so accepted, and if the one he serves asks his name, then is he obliged to tell it. But at the moment that he does so his miraculous power fails, and he is bound to return once more to the home of his order and to the Holy Grail. And now," he added mournfully, "let none wonder that I entreated my sweet bride never to ask the fatal question, since I am Lohengrin, one of the knights of the order,

and the son of the King Parsifal who presides over it."

As he ceased speaking, and Elsa fully realized all the harm she had done, and that Lohengrin had indeed no choice but to leave her, she cried to him in anguish, and the knight took her once more in his arms.

He was not angry with her for the fault which was bringing so much bitter grief to him as well as to herself, but very sad, and the only reproach he offered was, "O Elsa, my sweet wife, what have you done to me by forcing me to leave you?"

Then Elsa, in one last hope that the consequences of her fault might yet be averted, pleaded her repentance and implored Lohengrin to stay. It was in vain. The rule of his order summoned him, and Lohengrin was bound in honour to obey its call.

Only by the pain of their separation, he told her, could the fault that she had committed be atoned for and forgiveness won; and by this punishment not Elsa alone but he also was to suffer, since it was as hard for him to part with her as for her to part with him.

As Elsa heard these words she felt her own punishment doubled, since she was inflicting it also on the one she loved, who was himself innocent. And now, as the lovers stood clasped in each other's arms murmuring words of sad farewell, a cry arose from the crowd near the river, just as it had done on the occasion when Lohengrin had come to fight for Elsa's honour; and the words, "The swan! the swan!" struck on their hearts like a knell. For now they knew that the moment of their parting had indeed come.

Lohengrin gently disengaged himself from

Elsa's arms and approached the river bank; and as the swan paused there, drawing the boat behind it, he spoke to it sad words of greeting.

"Dear swan," he said, "how differently did I hope to see you return. If but one year had passed, I might have restored you to freedom through the might of the Holy Grail."

Then turning to Elsa, he said sorrowfully, "O Elsa, had you been faithful for one little year, not only should I have stayed with you, but I should have been able to restore to you your lost brother, who, by most wicked enchantments, was turned into the swan which you see before you now."

Then, while Elsa gazed at him and at the swan, overcome with surprise and wonder and bitter grief, he slowly unfastened the golden horn which hung round his neck, unfastened his sword, and took off a ring

which he wore on his finger; and handing these to Elsa, he bade her give them to her brother if he should return home to her and his country some day when Lohengrin himself would be far away.

"If he be in danger," he told her, "let him blow on the horn, and help will come to him. If he be in the thick of the fight, this trusty sword will give to him the victory. And the ring he shall have to keep in remembrance of the one who came to your succour when you were in such sore need."

As he spoke Elsa had recognized that the chain by which the swan drew the boat was in truth the self-same one by which Ortrud had enticed Gottfried from her side on that fatal day in the forest; and now, as Lohengrin ceased to speak, Ortrud herself drew near to her with triumphant eyes.

"Aha, Elsa!" she hissed in her ear, "now you will clearly see that you have not only lost your lover, but that your brother is also again lost to you by your own deed. Did I not recognize that chain at once when my eyes fell on it the day the swan brought your knight here? Now you will never see him more. The chain is fastened round his neck in such a way that no mortal hand but my own can ever unfasten it; and until it be unfastened the enchantment lasts, and he cannot return to human form. What though the count, my husband, is slain—I am yet unvanquished. I have won all that I meant to win; and which of us two women do you think has the best chance of reigning now, you or I?"

But Ortrud boasted too soon. Lohengrin now turned once more to Elsa and gave her a last tender embrace; then he tore himself from her arms, and as she sank

back half-swooning among her attendants, he approached the bank of the river where the swan and the boat still waited for him. Here Lohengrin knelt and prayed very earnestly; and as he did so, above the boat appeared the white form of a dove. At the sight of this he sprang joyfully to his feet, for he knew that it was the Dove of the Holy Grail, and that it had come in answer to his prayer.

By miraculous power he was now able to unfasten the chain round the swan's neck. As he did so, the swan seemed to disappear beneath the water; and the next moment there appeared in its place Gottfried, the heir of Brabant. With a cry of joy Elsa pressed her dearly-loved brother to her heart; but even as she did so, Lohengrin sprang lightly into the boat, and the dove, taking the chain in its beak, drew him swiftly out of sight.

Meanwhile Ortrud had crept away, overcome with confusion, and realizing that her power was over at last.

So Lohengrin sailed away from his bride, and Elsa was left to atone by bitter sorrow and repentance for that want of trust and faith which had lost her such great happiness. But I think she would not mourn for ever. I think that some day there would fall on her ears once more the soft, sweet music of her dreams, and she would see the form of her ideal knight clothed in shining armour, and with the old light of love in his eyes coming to her again from the blessed region where he dwelt.

Told by NORLEY CHESTER.

GALAHAD,

THE KNIGHT OF THE WHITE SHIELD.

GALAHAD.

Chapter I.

THE SIEGE PERILOUS.

MANY, many years ago, at the court of the great King Arthur of Britain, there was a knight whose name was Galahad. He was much younger than any of the other knights there, most of whom were men who had long been full grown, and had already fought in many battles ; and yet, in spite of his youth, his inexperience, and his comparative lack of bodily strength, it was given to Galahad to do great deeds which they could not accomplish, and to fulfil works in which they failed.

Galahad came to the court of Arthur in a curious manner. One Whitsuntide the king was feasting with his chosen knights in the great hall of his castle at Camelot, the chief city of his realm. Each of these knights had his own special seat or "siege" at what was known as the Round Table; and for this reason they were called the Knights of the Round Table. There were eleven of these at this time, and they had been specially chosen by the king as his close friends and most faithful followers; and they were bound by sacred oaths of knighthood to keep up a high standard of virtue and honour, to fight against all evil and wrong, to succour the oppressed, and at all times to uphold the right. It was a very high ideal that the great King Arthur had placed before his knights—too high, alas! for all to follow; and that they did not live up to it was afterwards the cause

of great grief and bitter sorrow to the king.

Now, though the number of the knights was eleven, this was not the full number intended. There were twelve seats at the Round Table, but one of these was so far unoccupied. The reason for this was that it was called the Siege Perilous, and it was said that any one who sat on it would do so at his own great risk and peril; and so far none amongst the knights had dared to attempt it. The seat was carved with strange figures, and round it was a scroll of writing in a tongue no one could understand; and the story was that Merlin the magician had fashioned it, and that he himself had sat upon it and had thereby lost his life. It was therefore little wonder that no one else cared to take the risk of sitting there.

But as Arthur and the knights sat at their feast on this Whitsun-day, there suddenly

appeared before them an aged knight clad in white, and with him a fair youth with a bright and noble countenance, named Galahad. No one knew them or whence they came; but Arthur, always the most chivalrous and courteous of knights, at once bade the strangers welcome. Then the old knight turned to Galahad and told him to follow him; and he led him straight to the Siege Perilous. Then, to every one's amazement, Galahad sat down in the seat without a moment's hesitation. So the king and all the knights knew from this sign that in spite of his tender age Galahad was the knight destined to take the empty place at the Round Table, and they welcomed him gladly as one of themselves. The old man who had brought him there, having now fulfilled his mission, kissed Galahad and went on his way alone.

And now another proof that Galahad was

The coming of Galahad.

no ordinary knight was to be given. Earlier in that same day a wonderful thing had happened. Just as the king and the court were returning to the palace after morning service, a squire—that is, a youth who had not yet been knighted—had come to the king with a marvellous story. He said he had seen floating on the river near by a great red stone, and stuck into it a wondrous sword set with precious stones and ornamented with letters of gold. Upon this the king said he would himself go at once to see this marvel, so he and all his knights went to the river-side. There indeed were the stone and the sword, as described by the squire; and when the inscription on the sword was read, it was found to be this:—

"Never shall man take me hence except he by whose side I ought to hang, and he shall be the best knight of the world."

When the king heard this, he turned to Lancelot, his favourite knight, and said that surely the sword must belong to him. But Lancelot replied sadly that this was not so, for he knew in his heart that he was not the true and perfect knight that the king deemed him. He also told the king that grievous harm might fall upon any one who, not being the perfect knight, should attempt to draw the sword from the stone. He gave this warning to other of the knights named Gawaine and Percivale, who were brave enough to try to take the sword; but neither of them could move it.

And now to return to Galahad. After he had taken his place in the Siege Perilous, and food had been given to him, the king raised a cloth which he had placed over the writing on the back of the seat; and there, to every one's amazement, was found the name of Galahad. So now there was

no possibility of doubt that Galahad was the chosen knight for the vacant seat; and the king next thought he would show him the stone with the sword that no one could move.

The king's wife, Queen Guinevere, and her ladies now joined the king and his knights, and they all accompanied Galahad to the river-side. But when the king pointed out the sword to him and told him that no knight of his company could move it, Galahad showed no surprise.

"Sir," he said to the king, "it is no marvel that the other knights could not move the sword, for the adventure was intended for me alone. For this reason, as you see, I have brought no sword;" and hereupon he pointed to the empty scabbard by his side. Then, taking the hilt of the sword in his hand, he drew the blade out of the stone with ease.

So now Galahad was armed with a sword ; but even yet he was not fully equipped for fight, for he had no shield with which to defend himself. The king noticed this, and he told the young knight that a shield would be sent him in due time ; and so indeed it proved.

Chapter II.

THE WHITE SHIELD:

SOME little time after this Galahad was riding in the country outside Camelot, and at eventide he came to a beautiful abbey, where he decided to rest for the night. He was made very welcome by the monks, and to his surprise he found two other of the Knights of the Round Table there also. So they all went to supper together.

As they sat at this meal Galahad asked his companions what had brought them to the place; and one of them, named Bagdemagus, replied that they had come to make trial of a great shield which was reported to be there, and of which it was

commonly said that any man who bore it round his neck would suffer grievous injury or death within three days.

"And," said Bagdemagus, "I mean to try it myself to-morrow, and prove whether this be true or not. If I fail," he continued, "then you, Galahad, may try; for I feel sure that to you, if not to me, it will be given to succeed in this adventure."

"Sir," replied Galahad, "I agree thereto most readily, for as yet I have no shield."

The next morning the two knights heard prayers together in the great abbey church, after which one of the monks led them to where the shield hung behind the high altar. It was a beautiful shield of the purest white with a red cross upon it, and as the monk showed it to them he gave them a word of warning.

"Know ye," said he, "that this shield should only be hung round the neck of the

Bagdemagus broke his own spear against his enemy's armour.

worthiest knight in the world; so I counsel both of you to consider well before you attempt to take it."

"Well," said Bagdemagus, "full well I know that I am not the worthiest knight in the world. Nevertheless I intend to try for the shield." And with this he took it down from where it hung, and bore it from the building.

When they came outside he bade Galahad await his return or tidings of him; and taking with him a squire, he rode forth in search of adventure in which to prove his new possession.

When he had gone abroad two miles he spied another knight approaching clad in white armour, and mounted on a goodly horse, who, when he saw Bagdemagus, rode at him full tilt with his spear. Bagdemagus thrust at him in return, and broke his own spear against his enemy's armour; but

the spear of the other smote Bagdemagus right through his breastplate, and the shield failed to protect him, so that he was badly wounded in the shoulder. Then the knight in white armour, after lifting his wounded enemy from his horse, took the shield from him.

"Sir," said he, "you have committed great folly against yourself, for this shield should only be borne by the worthiest knight in the world." He then handed it to the squire in attendance on Bagdemagus, and said, "Take it, I pray, to the good knight Galahad, who awaits you in the abbey, and greet him well from me."

"Sir," said the knight, as he took it, "I pray you tell me your name."

But this the knight would not do, since his name, he said, was not to be made known to any earthly man.

"Then, sir," entreated the squire, "tell

me, I pray, the reason why the shield does harm to any that bear it."

Then the knight replied that the reason for this was that the shield was intended for Galahad alone, and that therefore evil befell any one else who bore it.

So the squire returned to Galahad bearing the white shield, and bringing with him the wounded Bagdemagus, who was laid in bed at the abbey, and tended by the monks till he recovered.

Then Galahad hung the white shield on his neck, and mounting his horse rode forth praising God, and vowing to use his sword only in the cause of right. Thus Galahad became the Knight of the White Shield.

Chapter III.

THE HOLY GRAIL.

AND now the story of the most wonderful of all Galahad's adventures must be told. I have said before that, though he was the youngest and weakest of Arthur's twelve knights, for him was reserved honour above all the rest ; and in the story of the Holy Grail will be seen how this was the case, and how he succeeded where all others failed.

First I must tell you the legend of the Holy Grail before I come to the part it played in the story of Sir Galahad and the other knights. The Holy Grail was said to be the very cup out of which Christ drank

at the Last Supper; and, according to the legend believed by Arthur's knights, it was brought to England by Joseph of Arimathea, and placed in the abbey he founded at Glastonbury.

There for a time it remained as a source of blessing, held in great veneration by all, and the healer of any ill suffered by those who touched it. But when evil times came and heathen hordes overran the land, this sacred treasure was borne away and caught up to heaven. And now that Arthur had trodden down the evil in the land, and promoted peace and justice, it was hoped by the knights that the Holy Grail would be restored to them again; and each one cherished the ambition that he would be found worthy to behold it.

But as time went on and no sign of the sacred vessel was given, many of the knights ceased to think much about it; and the

memory of the Holy Grail might have begun to fade from the minds of men had it not been at this time kept alive by the vision of a certain nun.

Among the knights of Arthur's Round Table there was one already mentioned, named Percivale, a youth of a sweet and noble nature, which endeared him to all. Percivale had a sister who was a nun in a convent not far from Camelot, and one day a message came to him bidding him pay her a visit, since she had something important to tell him.

Sir Percivale did not delay to do so, for, though he could not often see his sister, he loved her dearly, both for her own sake and for the sweet and holy life which she led, and for which she was famed even outside the convent. He had not seen her for some time, and at the first sight of her he was struck by the wonderful change in her since

they last met; for her eyes glowed with a deeper and more spiritual light than any he had seen before, and her frail, fair body seemed to float before him as though she no longer dwelt on earth. But she greeted Percivale with the same sisterly affection as of old, and then, with a bright glow of rapture on her face, she told him her wonderful news.

"Brother, sweet brother," she said, holding his hand in hers, "I have seen the Holy Grail!"

And she told him how one night, when the moonlight flooded her cell, she was awakened by a sound as of silver horns on the distant hillside, which, as it drew nearer, became sweeter than any earthly music she had ever heard. Then into her cell streamed a wonderful beam of light, and in the midst of the beam she saw the rose-red Grail throbbing as if alive, and

casting a ruddy glow on the whitewashed wall.

Percivale was deeply impressed by his sister's story, and he hoped that if he fasted and prayed as she had done that to him too the blessed vision would be granted. He told his brother knights about it, and amongst them, of course, he told Galahad ; and in the eyes of the youthful knight he saw shining the same wonderful light he had seen in the nun's as he pondered over what he had heard. Then Percivale took Galahad to see his sister, and when she saw him the nun herself recognized something in his eyes which told her that his soul, too, was ready for the holy vision.

She cut off her long hair, which reached almost to her feet, and of this she plaited a wonderful girdle interwoven with a device of the Holy Grail in crimson and silver thread. This she bound round the waist of

Galahad as a belt for his sword, and she told him to go forth and always to seek the right, for then the vision he craved would be granted to him, and he would be crowned as king in a far-off spiritual city.

One summer evening not long afterwards Arthur's knights were all assembled in the hall at Camelot. The evening light was shining on them through the twelve great windows of the hall as they sat at the board; but suddenly all grew dark, a crash of thunder echoed above them, and with it came a mighty blast which seemed to crack and rend the roof.

Then, as the knights sat awestruck and motionless, a beam of light, seven times brighter and more dazzling than that of the sun, streamed into the hall; and down the beam stole the Holy Grail, closely covered with a cloud.

For a few seconds after the cup had dis-

appeared the wonderful light lingered, and each knight beheld the faces of the others illuminated as it were in a glory. Then the radiance faded, and all was as before ; but each knight knew that the Grail had passed, and that he had only seen it veiled.

Then in the silence which followed Percivale found voice. Springing to his feet he swore a vow that, because he had not seen the Grail, he would spend a twelvemonth and a day in quest of it until he should see it unveiled, even as his sister the nun had seen it. Galahad, too, sprang to his feet and swore the same solemn oath ; and nearly all the other knights, fired with the same burning desire, took the vow which Percivale and Galahad had taken.

King Arthur himself was not present with his knights that evening. Earlier in the day he had been called away from the castle by the distress of a beautiful lady who had

escaped from some robbers, and came to throw herself on his protection. Arthur had placed the lady in safety, and had then ridden forth to punish the robbers, and prevent them from molesting innocent ladies any more. As he rode home in the soft light of the summer evening with his task accomplished, the good king saw his city of Camelot before him, its high-pitched roofs, its watch-towers and spires, making a fair sight beneath the light of the setting sun as they clustered on the hillside.

At the very summit of all was the great castle with the hall where the knights were assembled, surrounded by walls covered with wonderful sculptured devices; and at the entrance stood a mighty statue in the semblance of Arthur himself wearing a golden crown, with great gold wings pointing to the northern star. The statue faced eastwards, so that at dawn it seemed clothed

with living fire, and the early labourers in fields some miles away could see it, and were reminded that a great and good king ruled the land.

As Arthur rode home on this summer evening with his eyes turned towards his royal city, he suddenly saw a cloud as of smoke cover the roof of the hall; and, seized with a fear that it had been struck by lightning, he put spurs to his horse, and did not draw rein until he had entered the hall itself. There he found none of the signs of fire which he had dreaded, but within the hall a strange confusion and excitement prevailed.

The knights had all risen from the board, and their eager faces and shining eyes still spoke of some unusual event, while even the entrance of the king did not stop the tumult of talk with which they discussed what had happened. Some were still eagerly

repeating their vows to start on the quest of the Grail, while others as eagerly protested and opposed such a course.

Then the king turned to Percivale, who happened to be near him, and demanded an explanation; and Percivale, with eager utterance, told him all the tale, beginning with his sister's vision, and ending with an account of what had just happened.

The king, seated motionless on his horse, himself calm and dignified as he always was, formed a great contrast to the excited crowd around him; but as he listened to the young knight's words, a dark cloud gathered on his countenance. He had thought that all his chosen knights were faithful to himself and to the cause of protecting his realm from the evil which threatened it; and now that he had left them but for a day, he found them all filled with one desire to leave him and go in search of adventures afar.

"Alas! my knights," he said, turning from one to the other, "had I been here you had not sworn the vow."

Then Percivale, fired with the courage of enthusiasm, made answer,—

"Not so, my king. Had you been here you would yourself have sworn it."

Upon this the king turned kindly to the youth, and asked him whether he had seen the Grail; and Percivale replied that he only heard the sound and saw the light, and that therefore he had vowed to follow till he saw the Grail unveiled.

Then the king asked the other knights one by one if they had seen it, and one and all made the same reply as Percivale; but Galahad was not asked, and of a sudden his voice rang out clearly through the hall and reached the place where Arthur stood.

"But I saw the Holy Grail, my king,"

he said. "I saw the Holy Grail, and heard a voice say, 'Galahad, O Galahad, follow me.'"

"O Galahad," said the king, "for such as thee, and for the holy nun, and for Percivale, these spiritual visions are intended; but as for you others," he said, turning sadly to the knights, "who have fought great battles and helped to secure this realm from the heathen hordes, are you not forsaking your duty to go after wandering fires? Lancelot is the bravest and strongest of our knights, and every unproved squire thinks he may some day be a Lancelot. And so with you. Galahad has seen, and the holy nun has seen, and you all think to see in your turn. Alas! while you are wandering through the land in quest of adventure, the chance of working noble deeds will come and be lost, and I shall be left alone with an empty board to protect my realm unaided.

Yet, now your vow is made, it must be held sacred, and you must go."

Then Arthur turned sadly and left the hall; for well he knew that if once his knights dispersed, the old Order of the Round Table could never be as before.

The next day a great tourney was held in the open field, for the king wished once more to see the strength of his knights displayed before him ere they started on their quest.

All the knights came out and closed in combat against each other, and the king and queen and all the court watched the joust. Many lances were broken that day, but the two youngest knights, Galahad and Percivale, overthrew the most, for so great was their enthusiasm that it gave them an unnatural strength. Knight after knight went down before their spears, till all the air echoed with the cry of the onlook-

ers—"Sir Galahad and Sir Percivale!" and the people nearly broke down the barriers in their wild attempts to get near them.

But the following day a great sadness fell on Camelot as the bravest knights of the Round Table sallied forth from her gates. Down the steep streets, from which the overhanging roofs nearly shut out the summer sky, they rode, and from roofs and windows the citizens beheld them pass; and as each knight went by, his name was shouted from one to the other down the street, and a hearty God-speed sent after him.

There rode Sir Lancelot, the bronzed and bearded hero of a hundred fights, the king's trusted friend, and the favourite of all for his strength and courtesy. There rode, too, Sir Bors, his cousin, who, with none of the courtly bearing and manner of Sir Lancelot,

had a brave, stout heart—a square-set, honest man, whose eyes and lips smiled together when he spoke. Sir Gawaine followed, the careless, easy-going knight, riding his horse with loose rein, and even now exchanging jests with those he greeted, as though he were merely sallying forth for a day's pleasure.

Last came the two young knights Percivale and Galahad; and when they passed the shouts of the people grew louder than before as they hailed the victors in yesterday's joust. Sir Percivale's face flushed with eager pleasure in response, and a proud smile played on his lips; but Sir Galahad heard the shouts unmoved, for his thoughts were far away from his own triumphs, and his eyes glowed with the same deep spiritual light which Percivale had seen in those of his sister, the holy nun.

But if the people on the roofs and at the

windows shouted and acclaimed as the little band of knights rode forth, in the streets below and at the gateway where the king and queen and all the court were assembled sights and sounds of grief prevailed. Brave knights and fair ladies wept to see the heroes depart, and the poor, who had flocked there, wept with the rich. Even the king could hardly speak, and the Queen Guinevere shed many bitter tears. Well might she weep, for she had a secret cause for grief. Her heart, which should have been loyal to the noble king, her husband, alone, had been secretly given to his trusted friend Lancelot; and for this hidden sin and deception against the king she feared that ill would now come to them all. But the great king was too good to see what was evil unless it lay clearly exposed before him; and when Guinevere cried and moaned as Lancelot rode by, he still failed to suspect that she was false to

him. And so out from Camelot that summer day rode the little band of knights, leaving the Round Table deserted and the good king's heart filled with sorrow and misgiving.

Chapter IV.

THE RETURN OF THE KNIGHTS.

THE year of the quest had passed, and on his throne in the great hall at Camelot Arthur awaited the return of his knights. And now, slowly and sorrowfully, a little band with worn and wasted appearance entered the gateway of the city which they had left so proudly. All who had gone forth were not there, but among the company could be seen Percivale, and Lancelot, and the honest Bors, and light-hearted Gawaine.

As they approached the hall a scene of devastation awaited them, for a mighty gale had arisen and scattered broken pieces of stone carving from the buildings on to the

roadway before them ; it had also rent one of the golden wings from the giant statue of Arthur, and caused even the hall itself to rock to its foundations, so that those who felt it had whispered in awestruck tones to each other that surely an evil omen were intended. Before long the knights stood once more before their great king, and with eager interest he questioned them as to their fortune in the quest.

Many and strange were the adventures which had befallen them during that year of wandering afar ; but only to two of those who came back had the vision been granted, and to those only in a fleeting glimpse. Good Sir Bors was one of these. The blunt, simple knight had seen the vision, which, as we shall see, was denied to the heroic Lancelot, although he desired it greatly, while Bors cared little for it himself, if only Lancelot might behold it. Perhaps in this

was the secret of his success; for those who crave a blessing for another achieve the truest blessedness, while those who seek a good thing for themselves alone are rarely blessed at all.

How Sir Bors came to see the vision was in this wise. In his wanderings he came to a wild, remote region, where some of the original inhabitants of the country still lived and practised heathen rites, and believed in magic and many things which Christianity had shown to be false. When Bors told those people of his quest and what it was he sought, they laughed at him as a foolish person; and as this led to a dispute between Bors and their priest, the people grew very angry, and seizing the knight, bound him fast in a dungeon.

As he lay there in total darkness, one of the stones which formed his dungeon wall fell from its place, which was little less than

a miracle, because, though a strong wind was raging at the time, the stone was too heavy to be blown from its position. Through the gap in his prison walls Bors could see a glimpse of the dark sky and of the stars, for it was night. Then across the gap he saw the Holy Grail itself glide slowly, while a sound as of thunder struck his ears. Bors could hardly believe that he should have been so blessed, for he deemed himself quite unworthy ; but this, as I have said, was in truth the very reason why he deserved to see the vision. Soon after this he was secretly released from his dungeon by a maiden who, unknown to her friends, had become a follower of Christ.

Now, while the knights stood before the king, the good Sir Bors had seized the hand of Lancelot in his and stood somewhat behind him ; for it gave him small pleasure that he had succeeded in his quest, since he knew

that Lancelot had failed and could not share his joy. But Arthur saw him in his hiding-place, and called to him across the hall.

"Hail, Bors!" he said, "hast thou beheld the Grail? Surely, if ever loyal knight and true were fit to do so, thou art the man."

Bors simply replied that he had seen it, but begged that he should not be questioned on the matter; and then, brave knight though he was, he turned his face aside, for the tears were in his eyes.

The king now turned with anxious affection to Lancelot.

"And thou, Lancelot, my friend, the mightiest of our knights," he said, "hath the quest availed for thee?"

Then a groan burst from Lancelot, for, though he had sinned much, he was still too noble for the king's undeserved praise not to be agony to him; and it was with bitter pain that he told the king how the

quest was not for him, whose sin was too great. The king heard this confession with grief and surprise; but he did not guess what the sin was, nor imagine that Lancelot had been so false a friend as to win the heart of Queen Guinevere away from the king, her husband, and to love her himself in secret. He was only puzzled as to what this sin of Lancelot's could be which he could not pluck out of his soul, and which prevented him from seeing the Holy Grail.

Lancelot told him how he had sought to free himself from it, and how, almost mad with the pain and the conflict, he had come to a wild country inhabited by a race of men smaller and weaker than himself. At one time he could easily have frightened them by the mere waving of his spear, but now, weakened by his sin and remorse, he had been beaten down and put to shame by them. Not long afterwards he came to the coast,

where he found an empty boat, in which he embarked.

After seven days out on the open waters he saw before him the great castle of Carbouch, built on a solid rock, and approached by steps which came down to the edge of the sea. There were no sentinels to guard the entrance, but instead Lancelot saw by the light of the full moon a lion on either side. Out sprang the knight from his boat, and as he stepped on shore both the great beasts stood up on their hind legs like gigantic men, and each seized him by a shoulder.

Lancelot was about to draw his sword and slay them, when he heard a voice which told him to doubt not but go forward, and that if he doubted the beasts would tear him to pieces. As the voice ceased, the sword was dashed with violence from his hand by some unseen force. So Lancelot pressed forward

into the castle, and found himself in a large, empty hall, through the great oriel window of which he saw the quiet moon shining on the sea below; and in the stillness there broke on his ear a sweet voice, clear as the note of a lark, singing from the topmost tower of the castle.

Up a thousand steps sped Lancelot, and at last he reached the door from within which came the sound of the music. "Glory and joy and honour to our Lord, and to the holy vessel of the Grail," sang the voice as Lancelot pushed against the door, which gave way before him. In the blinding glare and heat within he thought to see the Holy Grail guarded by great angels; but the sacred vessel was closely veiled, and Lancelot sank to the ground in a swoon, for by this token he knew that the quest was not for him.

When he had finished this strange story Lancelot passed out of the hall with down-

cast glances of shame ; and the king watched him go in sorrow, but spoke no word.

He turned next to Gawaine ; but the tale of the light-hearted, pleasure-loving knight was quickly told, for he had soon grown weary of the quest, and made up his mind it was not for him. Then he found a gay pavilion filled with merry girls—which was more to his taste than a spiritual adventure—and there, feasting and laughing with them, he had passed his time. He wound up by saying that henceforth he intended to be deaf to all stories of holy nuns ; but to this the king replied reproachfully,—

"O Gawaine, think not to become more blind and deaf than you are now, since you are already too blind to what is highest and noblest even to wish to see it."

So now there remained only Percivale to tell his tale. He too had seen strange

adventures, but the most interesting part of what he had to tell was what had befallen the absent Galahad of the White Shield, for he alone knew all the story.

At first Percivale had not succeeded in the quest, for he had not started forth with the singleness of aim and the unconsciousness of self which should have been his. He was too much puffed up by the thought of his victories in the tourney the day before he left Camelot, and the consequence was that his moral force was weakened, and he fell an easy prey to temptation.

At one time it seemed as if he would forsake the quest, for he met with a beautiful lady whom he once thought to love. She had married some one else, and now he was dead and she was left with great possessions. And when Percivale came to the place where she dwelt with many fair maidens, she made him very welcome and feasted

him more and more sumptuously each day, so that Percivale became lost in pleasure, and for a time his sacred vow was almost forgotten. But one night he woke filled with a burning recollection of it and an overwhelming sense of shame; and he rose and fled from the castle.

In the course of his wanderings he came to a hermitage where dwelt a holy man, to whom Percivale confessed everything; and the hermit told him that what he lacked was humility, and that even at that time he thought too much of his own sins, and had not lost himself to save himself as Galahad had done. Just as he spoke Galahad himself appeared at the door in shining silver armour; and when he saw Percivale within he laid aside his spear and entered. Then the two young knights received the sacrament from the hands of the monk, and when the service was ended Galahad said

that he had plainly seen the Holy Grail. But Percivale had seen nothing but the bread and wine.

"I," said Galahad again, "saw it descend on the altar and smite the bread, and disappear. Indeed, never yet since your sister taught me to see the vision have I failed to do so. The Holy Grail is ever with me as I journey—fainter by day and blood-red in the night. In the strength of it I have prevailed everywhere with my spear, shattering evil, destroying the heathen, and proclaiming the right. But now, brother, my time is well-nigh at hand, and I go to a spiritual city which awaits me. Come thou with me, for thou too shalt see the vision when I go."

So the two young knights started forth together, but it was not long before they were to part. Soon they came to a high hill surrounded by a dark and evil swamp,

For one moment Percivale saw him stand out clear as a star.

and across the swamp was a great bridge on many piers which ran right out to the sea. Over this bridge sped Galahad, and each pier as he touched it sprang into flame behind him and vanished, so that, much as Percivale longed to follow him, he could not do so. He could only stand on the hillside and watch Galahad's silver armour gleam fainter and fainter as he went on his wondrous way. But when Galahad reached the great sea there was a wonderful sound as of angels singing; and for one moment Percivale saw him stand out clear as a star, while above his head there hovered the Holy Grail, redder than any rose.

For that one moment the veil was withdrawn for Percivale, and in the sudden glory around him he saw in a brief vision the pearl gateways and golden walls of the spiritual city where Galahad, the spotless Knight of the White Shield, was to reign.

So the youngest and bravest knight had succeeded where all others failed, and to Galahad of the White Shield alone came the full and perfect vision, and for him alone was the quest. And the meaning of this is clear now as it was then, for to the pure of heart all things are possible, and those who would wear the victor's crown in the battle of life must seek it even as Galahad did, with no thought of self.

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